American Editors Haled Before the Bar by Upton Sinclair

Socialist Attacks the Press

"The Brass Check" Charges a General Conspiracy of Dishonest Propaganda

By Heywood Broun

IT SEEMS to us that everybody who feels that our newspapers are inclined to color the news with editorial opinion, with sensationalism and with vulgarity, has a just cause of grievance against Upton Sinclair for his "The Brass Check, a Study of American Journalism." He has hurt an excellent case by overstatement and he has clouded it by introducing a mass of evidence which is trifling and often entirely beside the point. For instance, the heaviest indictment which can be made against the newspapers of America lies in the case of Russia. It is difficult to see how anybody can deny to-day that a vast amount of misinformation has been printed about conditions in Soviet Russia. Of course, newspaper publishers may say in their own defense that gathering news about Russia has been extremely difficult. That must be admitted, and yet there seems to be little excuse for the fact that every wild rumor about Russia from Copenhagen or Stockholm or Omsk was seized upon and often featured.

It is not enough for the editor to say:

"We did not guarantee this news. We knew that it rested on rumor and we printed it as such for what it was worth."

The reader should not be expected to discount news accurately. That is the business of the editor. It is also difficult to defend the fact that long after the story about the nationalization of women was shown to have all the weight of the evidence against it American newspapers continued to refer to this condition in Russia as if it had never been questioned.

Newspapers also served their readers ill in reporting and featuring every report of a Kolchak success up to the very moment that he fell, although there was ample reason in experience to distrust the communiqués coming from this source.

Nor is it to the credit of American newspapers that the average New Yorker never heard of Tom Mooney until his name was mentioned in a dispatch from Russia about a Bolshevik demonstration in front of the American legation in Petrograd. In these cable dispatches he appeared as Tom Muni and that was the name used in several New York newspapers which were absolutely ignorant about an important trial in California which had Russia by the ears.

And yet even when all this has been set down there remains a possibility that the poor showing of the press rested upon stupidity as much as upon dishonesty. Sinclair attributes a devilish ingenuity to American newspapers which they by no means possess. Also it is fair to say that although Sinclair makes no exceptions (save for the radical press) in his blanket charge of dishonest conspiracy against the American press, "The New York Globe," "The New York World" and "The Chicago Tribune," among others, did succeed in getting first hand news from Russia which was conspicuously featured in spite of the fact that the findings of the correspondent were often in conflict with the editorial opinion of the paper which he represented.

Sinclair does not neglect the case of Russia, but it gets no more emphasis than his account of what "The San Francisco Examiner" did to the story of Upton Sinclair and the two shredded wheat biscuits. Sinclair objects because the newspaper headlined the fact that he had objected to an overcharge on a hotel bill for shredded wheat. He adds rather bitterly:

"An actress by the name of Rose Stahl was playing up in Seattle and her publicity man must have seen an opportunity to 'get in on the game.' In the afternoon paper there appeared a story to the effect that Rose Stahl had telegraphed me 25 cents with which to pay for my shredded wheat biscuit. Rose Stahl did not actually send me the 25 cents; at any rate I never received it; she merely gave out the story that she was sending it."

To be sure, Sinclair uses the incident only as a link in his attempt to prove that the newspapers of America are banded together in a conspiracy to make him ridiculous because he is a radical. He cites ample evidence prove that every event, however trifling, in which he could be made to appear ludicrous was seized upon by the newspapers of the nation, while there was a concrete wall of silence against him when he had news of importance to give out. Undoubtedly this is true, but the assumption which Sinclair makes upon the basis of his experience will not stand. Speaking of the leisure class, he says: "They are 'society'; they are the people who own the world and for whom the world exists, and in every newspaper office there is a definite understanding that so long as these people keep out of the law courts there shall be published no uncomplimentary news concerning them."

I have been on three newspapers, and I never heard of any such definite understanding. Just to prove to Mr. Sinclair that I can say something uncomplimentary about a wealthy man, I will venture to hazard the opinion that John D. Rockefeller plays a rotten game of golf and that I didn't think much of the attitude of his son during the Colorado strike, either. The tendency of the newspapers to exploit trifles and pass by serious utterances is not a system designed merely for the confounding of Socialists. Nobody had a score to pay against Dr. Osler, and yet he was known to America solely as the man who said that everybody ought to be chloroformed at sixty.

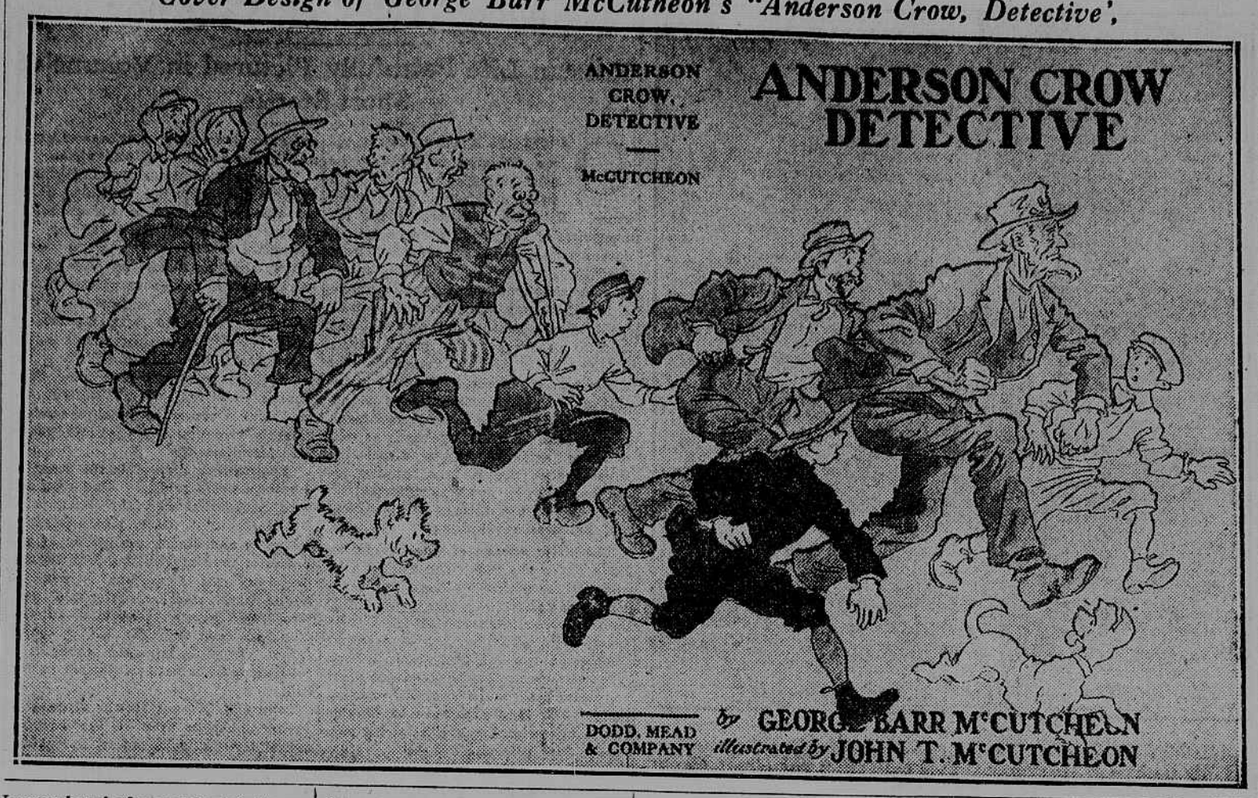
Again, there is no solid foundation for the assumption of Sinclair contained in his observation: "How many, many times have I observed the great organs of American plutocracy thus awed into decency by wealth! When Frank Walsh, as chairman of the United States Commission on Industrial Relations, made a radical speech in New York 'The Times' telegraphed to Kansas City and learned that Walsh was a lawyer, earning $50,000 a year. It was comical to observe the struggle between its desire to lambast a man who had made a radical speech and its cringing before a man who was earning $50,000 a year!"

That is childish. I don't know what Frank Walsh is earning at the present moment, but I do know that he has been lambasted about as hard as any man in public life in the newspapers of New York. The great wealth of Henry Ford and William Jennings Bryan has never prevented the metropolitan press from getting after them.

Again, the same peculiar delusion appears in the following observation of Sinclair: "My wife had taken up the demonstration after my arrest, and I was amused to observe that the police did not arrest her, nor did the newspapers ridicule her. Was it because she was a woman? No, for I have seen the police beat and club women doing picket duty—workingwomen, you understand. I have seen the newspapers lie about workingwomen on picket duty; in the course of the Colorado campaign I saw them print the vilest and most cowardly slanders about the wives of some strikers who went to Washington to make appeal to President Wilson. No, it was not because my wife was a woman; it was because she was a 'lady.' It was because in the files of New York newspapers there reposed a clipping recording the fact that her father was 'one of the wealthiest men in this section and controls large banking interests.'"

We are perfectly willing to admit that Upton Sinclair has received harsh and often unjust attention from American newspapers. The fact that he was considered a radical, though in truth a moderate, may have whetted the desire of the press for sensational stories about him. But over and above all this is the fact that he was good copy. If he had possessed $50,000,000 we have little doubt that the shredded wheat story would have found its way into the newspapers just the same. Sinclair makes a mistake in grounding so much of his case against the newspapers on what they have done to him. The contest must be fought on bigger issues. After all, when somebody issues a complete and devastating attack on a press which is sometimes dishonest and even more often limited and short sighted, he will have no time to give to the fact that the editor of a great conservative New York newspaper once invited a novelist to his office and tried to kiss her. Even a radical editor might do that.

Cover Design of George Barr McCutheon's "Anderson Crow, Detective'



An Eccentric Major

"Horse Play" a Feature of Keble Howard's Story

EVIDENTLY Mr. Keble Howard hasn't a very high opinion of the literary style of army officers. Either that or he hasn't any style of his own.

"The Peculiar Major," by Keble Howard, published by George H. Doran Company, is a burlesque account of an English officer's ambition and plans to kill the Kaiser. The whole book is spent in getting ready to accomplish this coup, but unfortunately the war ends before anything worth while is done through the Major's "peculiarity."

The preface carries a letter from H. G. Wells assuring Mr. Howard that his book, "The Peculiar Major" will not clash with that of Mr. Wells's "The Invisible Man." Mr. Wells was right. It not only doesn't clash, but the reader would not even have thought of Mr. Wells's book had his name not attracted attention to the preface.

To go back to the major's peculiarity, out in the Near East a Turkish priest, none too friendly to the British, we presume, gave the major an eccentric ring. The accounts of his experiences while wearing the ring inspire the major's C. O. to send him back to "Blighty."

The possibilities in the ring inspire the major to scheme to get rid of the Kaiser through its power. In the mean time he tries the ring out in London. It carries him into experiences with all classes. From his clash with a woman bus driver it is evident that Mr. Howard or some of his friends have suffered at the hands of these women who supposedly took the places of men who had gone into war service.

"I was the sole passenger above the formally stipulated number," says the major, describing his adventure with the bus. "Yet she (the woman conductor) constantly refused to allow any one else to board the vehicle. She was in the full enjoyment of her brief, and, let us hope, passing authority, and she was determined to give her vixenish spleen full play."

Before the ride is over the major has so provoked the conductorette with his Puck-like uses of his ring power that she beats up an old man and shows variety in her use of bad language.

In the House of Lords, the major plays pranks with the precious notes of some of the members. The debate this provokes may be typical of the repartee in which members of the House of Lords indulge. We cannot say, never having been in the House of Lords. However, it makes a Southern Senator's remarks on suffrage take new color as full of wisdom and dignity in comparison.

The adventures brought about by the ring, or by the "touch of sun," are none of them hair-raising enough to make a real adventure story. They are not amusing enough to be comedy. And they are not serious enough to convince the reader of anything. "Horse play" is the best description we can think of.

There is a "triangle" in the story. The major's fiancée, who has been waiting for him for years, after the manner of English girls in books, is almost overshadowed in his affections for a time by a "lady" in the disguise of a nurse. Just in time, however, the countess sees the love light in the fiancées eyes and turns her smiles aside.

Sassoon in Transition

Burning Hatred of War and Search for Forgetfulness Blended in "Picture Show"

SOME day an intrepid reviewer will write of Siegfried Sassoon without using "bitterness" and "scorn" in every paragraph. Yet it seems almost impossible to consider Mr. Sassoon's poetry without falling back on these handy words, for his latest volume, "Picture-Show" (Dutton), serves only to emphasize again the acerb contempt which the poet holds for war and for those who would transfigure war into a grand and glorious feeling.

The fighting days are done, but Mr. Sassoon lives in the shadow of battle. The horrors he endured in the days when he carried on bravely (he would hate this description) at the head of his company are still with the poet. Peace to him is a cessation of war rather than a new era with new and bloodless battles to be fought. His overwhelming hatred for the "professional" attitude toward military matters expresses itself in one of the most searingly brutal poems that any soldier has produced:

ATROCITIES

You told me, in your drunken-boasting mood,
How once you butchered prisoners. That was good!
I'm sure you felt no pity while they stood
Patient and cowed and scared, as prisoners should.

How did you do them in? Come, don't be shy;
You know I love to hear how Germans die.
Downstairs in dugouts, "Kamerad!" they cry;
Then squeal like stoats when bombs begin to fly.

. . . . . .

And you? I know your record. You went sick
When orders looked unwholesome; then, with trick
And lie, you wangled home. And here you are,
Still talking big and boozing in a bar.

Although Mr. Sassoon's attacks on war are no less virulent than in his earlier volumes, "Picture-Show" seems to be a transitional work. He is seeking forgetfulness in beauty and in the fantastic romance of the motion picture screen. If we may venture a prophecy—and with a poet of Mr. Sassoon's ability, forecasts are dangerous—his future work will follow the lines indicated in his "Vision":

I love all things that pass; there briefness is
Music that fades on transient silences.
Winds, birds and glittering leaves that flare and fall—
They fling delight across the world; they call
To rhythmic-flashing limbs that rove and race . . .
A moment in the dawn of Youth's lit face;
A moment's passion, closing on the cry—
"O Beauty, born of lovely things that die!"

Mr. Sassoon succeeds in glorifying the "movies"—it is obvious that they are American pictures—as few poets have done. At the picture show he finds himself not the war-weary veteran, but William S. Hart:

. . . . . You saw me
Fix that saloon? They stared into my face
And slowly put their hands up, while I stood
With dancing eyes—romantic to the world!

Things happened afterward . . . You know the story . . .
The sheriff's daughter, bandaging my head;
Love at first sight; the escape; and making good
(To music by Mascagni). And at last—
Peace; and the gradual beauty of my smile.

But that's all finished now. One has to take
Life as it comes. I've nothing to regret.
For men like me, the only thing that counts
Is the adventure. Lord, what times I've had!

God and King Charles! And then my mistress's arms . . .
(To-morrow evening I'm a Cavalier).

Beneath Mr. Sassoon's ironic excoriations of war there is a vein of tenderness and pity. He even is capable of finding a flash of humor in his own troubled mind. "Picture-Show" seems like the fade-in on a new reel which is to show us a different Sassoon—a Sassoon not fundamentally apart from the disillusioned warrior and yet a more lyrical, more appealing and no less distinguished poet.

Crossed Wires

THE reason for the inefficient telephone service is explained by Albert Edward Ullman's "The Line's Busy" (Stokes). It appears that the "hello girls" are writing letters in the Lardnerian manner. At least, that is what Goldie, Mr. Ullman's operator, does between and probably during calls.

Goldie is one of those apparently illiterate persons who is so well aware of her illiteracy that she writes "ain't" with the apostrophe and "oughter" in the most approved phonetic fashion. She loads her epistles with such things as "he sends in so many calls for ice water sometimes that you'd think he had a pet polar bear in his room," and although she never reaches the sublime heights of the immortal busher, she manages to be amusing in a rather mechanical style.

However, the service probably will improve, for Mr. Ullman's book informs us that Goldie is to marry Bill, her wild and woolly friend.

THE ROYAL CANARY—By Daniel Riche

Translated by William L. McPherson

Here is a brisk and entertaining little story from the facile pen of Daniel Riche

THE young woman dismounted from her horse and gently stroked its nose before turning it over to a stable boy. Then, somewhat embarrassed by her riding skirt, she followed her cavalier to an arbor, covered with honeysuckle, clematis and grape vines.

They seated themselves, face to face, on two narrow wooden benches, separated by a rustic table, painted green. A bottle of lemonade, the only thing which they thought it becoming to order in such a public place, was brought and put before them.

Adalbert took the hand which the little Baroness Gudule had let fall on the table. And, since the young woman didn't withdraw it, as she usually did, he ventured, in a trembling voice, to avow his feelings. Her usual curt phrase: "You can't be serious, my friend; you forget that you are speaking to the Baroness de Vandermann, the widow of the highest dignitary at the court," didn't arrest his declaration. So his timidity decreased, his voice cleared and he pressed her hand almost roughly.

"Say something. I tell you that I love you, that I adore you to the point of killing myself, if you don't permit me to hope. Answer me. Must I die?"

Gudule looked at him with her big, steel-gray eyes, and her firm mouth softened into a little smile.

"No; you don't need to die. That is foolish. Why do you want to die?"

He answered in an injured tone:

"You haven't understood, then, what I have just been saying to you?"

"Yes, perfectly. Only my ear has been distracted by the bird which is singing in its cage at the inn door. Do you hear its trills? What ease and suppleness! It is wonderful!"

"But," he answered, peevishly, "we are not concerned with this ridiculous little beast, which gargles out roulades because it was born to sing. We were talking of my bleeding heart, of my love for you."

He rose and moved toward his companion.

"Come, baroness; give me an answer."

"I should like to have that bird," said the young woman, still listening intently to the tiny artist.

Adalbert brought down his whip so violently on the rustic table that the bottle and the glasses shook and came near upsetting.

The proprietress, thinking that her patrons wanted to give another order, came running to the arbor. The young man asked her:

"What bird is that singing in the cage?"

"Monsieur," the good woman replied, with a curtsey, "that is a Dutch canary. And as my late husband, who had traveled much, used to say: 'If the Italian women know how to sing well, the canaries of Holland can sing even better.'"

"A thousand francs," Gudule broke in—"I will give you a thousand francs for your bird."

"But I don't want to sell it. You might offer me one hundred thousand francs, in beautiful gold louis, heaped up there on the table, and I wouldn't part with it."

"Why?"

"Because (and she bowed low as if the personage evoked were before her)—because my bird came to me from His Majesty the King."

"The king gave you a Dutch canary?"

"Yes, monsieur. That is to say, his fowler, who was fond of me because his mother had known mine since they were little girls, kept telling me for years: 'I will make you a royal present, Gertrude; you shall see.' When I teased him about it (for, like my dead father, I have a loose tongue in my head and am fond of teasing my friends), he said to me: 'Quit that; I still remember my promise!'

"So he presented me with the cage which you can see from here only if you bend forward, for, God be thanked, my son, who is now in the Congo, planted all these vines ten years ago, before he started. 'Here is a Dutch canary,' said my friend, the fowler. 'It is our best singer, the one which the king listened to with the most pleasure when, before his illness, a chance walk in the park brought him in the neighborhood of the birdhouse. It hasn't its equal in the world. I give it to you.' That is how I happen to own this unique songster, which attracts the admiration of all and for which everybody envies me."

Springing to her feet, the little baroness exclaimed:

"Give me this bird, no matter what the price. I want it."

"Excuse me," answered the proprietress, "but I acquired from my grandfather Wilden a very positive character. One day he was obliged to cut his employer in two because the latter wanted to force him to accept an increase in wages. So, having inherited his firmness, I say to you: 'You may want my royal canary as much as you please. I shall never part with it.'"

The proprietress's tone was so categorical that the young woman insisted no longer.

"Come, Adalbert," she said.

Quitting the arbor, entwined with its flowers and leaves, she regained the highroad, where their mounts were waiting for them.

The baroness started off on a gallop. Her companion followed. Divining her wrath, he didn't dare to utter a word.

Mme. de Vandermann stopped her horse suddenly, throwing him back on his haunches.

"Listen, Adalbert!"

The young man came up from behind.

"Do you love me?"

"Do you doubt it?"

"Well, my dear man, for the love of me you will get me that royal canary within three days. If you don't I shall never see you again as long as I live."

"And if I bring it to you?"

"Have confidence in my gratitude."

As evening fell on the third day Adalbert presented himself at his lady love's house. He carried a gold cage, inside which the royal canary, saluting the setting sun, poured forth full-throatedly an amazing cavatina.

"How did you do it?" asked the delighted baroness.

"I stole it."

"That is bad."

"Nothing is bad if you are the recompense for it."

She was already hanging the cage at a window, and stopped at her task to throw him a kiss. Then, a little worried, she returned to him.

"To-morrow," she said, "the woman will see the empty cage. She will remember our offers and will suspect us."

"Evidently, if she had found the cage empty she would have made trouble for us. But I went to all the bird dealers in the province and succeeded in getting a tufted bird, identical in color, which I substituted for the royal canary. The resemblance is so striking that an expert might easily be deceived."

"They were twin brothers," she said, with a smile.

"No," he replied, "it was a twin sister, for I could find only a female. But that doesn't matter."

The little baroness raised her arms to heaven.

"That doesn't matter? But, unfortunate young man, your shrewish landlady will discover your trickery to-morrow."

"Why?"

"Because the canary will not sing."

"How so?"

"In the bird kingdom the female, just before taking up her maternal duties, has no voice. Her mate, a tender and charming friend, makes his fragile throat vibrate with crystalline cascades in order to amuse his loved one, while she sits motionless on her future brood for hours, days and weeks, giving the eggs the benefit of her warmth. Would you, brutal man, know how to surround with such sweet attention the feeble woman who should be your wife?"

"I shall know how to love you all my life," he said, taking her in his arms.

* * * * *

The summer died away into the ruddy gold of autumn. All nature stained itself with purple and ochre. Adalbert, his amorous fever slaked a little, had entered into a calmer enjoyment of the state of matrimony.

He thought with gratitude of the humble inn alongside the road, of the canary bird, of the substitution which he had carried through, of all the incidents which had led up to his happiness.

Occupied with their duties at court, the king having died the day of their betrothal, they hadn't had an opportunity to return to the distant roadhouse. They both wanted to make a pilgrimage there. Assuming that the proprietress had quickly discovered the trick played on her, they wanted to hear her lamentations and to console her with a rich gift.

Seated in the same arbor, all red with the grains of the honeysuckle and the dying foliage of the vines, and bending forward as before, they saw in the cage over the door a tufted bird which hopped about gayly.

The proprietress brought them some lemonade, and Adalbert timidly asked her:

"Well, my good woman, how is your canary? After we went away you must have regretted that you didn't sell it to us."

The proprietress looked at them pityingly.

"In the first place," she said, "I never regret anything. In the second place, I wouldn't exchange for an empire this intelligent beast, who has a heart—one could say a heart such as few human beings have!"

"How is that?" they cried in astonishment.

"Would you believe it, my handsome monsieur and my pretty lady, that since our good king died this dear little creature hasn't sung a single note?"